

Message Text

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51

ACTION EUR-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 863

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EFIN, BE

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT: STATE OF PLAY

1. THIS MESSAGE SUMS UP THE BELGIAN ATTITUDE ON THE F-104 REPLACEMENT ISSUE AS I SEE IT ON LEAVING BELGIUM. ON ONE HAND, SENIOR GOB MINISTERS STATE FIRMLY THAT NO DECISION HAS BEEN MADE, THAT FULL CONSIDERATION WILL BE GIVEN TO ALL COMPETITORS, AND THAT TECHNICAL SUPERIORITY WILL BE GIVEN DUE WEIGHT, ALONG WITH ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS IMPORTANT TO BELGIUM. ON OTHER HAND, PERSISTENT REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE THREE DIRECTLY-CONCERNED MINISTERS IN THE PERVIOUS GOVERNMENT REACHED AN "AGREEMENT" TO PURCHASE THE FRENCH MIRAGE. THE NATURE AND FORM OF THAT AGREEMENT REMAIN UNKNOWN TO US. REPORTS ABOUT IT INTERSECT WITH REPORTS ABOUT AN AGREEMENT WHEREIN GOB ASKED DASSAULT TO EXTEND ITS OFFER UNCHANGED, UNTIL JULY 31, 1974.

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2. WE HAVE NO FIRM DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED FRENCH-BELGIAN SUPER MIRAGE PRODUCTION AGREEMENT BUT HAVE HEARD THAT IT INCLUDES PROVISIONS THAT:

--BELGIANS WILL PURCHASE 117 AIRCRAFT OUT OF MINIMUM OF 217 CONSIDERED NECESSARY FOR PRODUCTION;

-- TEAM OF BELGIAN ENGINEERS TO WORK IN FRENCH PLANT DURING FINAL DESIGN STAGE.

WE HEAR THAT BELGIAN INDUSTRIES ARE HUNGRY FOR THE DEAL BUT FIND U.S. OFFERS EQUALLY OR MORE ATTRACTIVE; ALSO, THAT CASE FOR PURCHASING FRENCH PRODUCT IS ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL RATHER THAN ECONOMIC OR MILITARY.

3. MY OPINION IS THAT AN INNER CIRCLE OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT DID MAKE AN IN-HOUSE DECISION TO BUY FRENCH, SUBJECT TO THE POSSIBLE EMERGENCE OF NEW FACTORS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. OF THE THREE MINISTERS WHO SIGNED THE DASSAULT MEMORANDUM REGARDING THE MIRAGE, AT LEAST ONE (VANDEN BOEYNANTS) PROBABLY REMAINS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO PURCHASING THE FRENCH PRODUCT.

4. HOWEVER, I ALSO BELIEVE THAT A MAJOR CHANGE HAS OCCURRED SINCE MARCH. THE INSTALLATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT UNDER PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS HAS ALTERED THE BELGIAN CONSTELLATION OF POLITICAL FORCES, EVEN THOUGH IT LEAVES FRENCH-ORIENTED VANDEN BOEYNANTS AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE. THE CURRENT GOB INVOLVEMENT IN FOUR-NATION COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF F-104 REPLACEMENT IS AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT POSITIVE FACTOR. REGARDLESS OF ANY COMMITMENT MADE PREVIOUSLY, THE BELGIANS WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO GET OUT OF A COMMITMENT TO COORDINATE WITH THE NETHERLANDS, DENMARK, AND NORWAY. THEY ARE LIKELY TO BE CARRIED ALONG BY COMMON DECISION, IF ONE CAN BE REACHED. I STRONGLY RECOMMEND, THEREFORE, THAT USG EFFORTS BE REDOUBLED WITH FOSTERVALL AND VREDELING. STRAUSZ-HUPE

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